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Justice Admits Error In Shaw-Bertrand Tie

By George Lardner Jr.
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The Department of Justice acknowledged yesterday that it goofed in ever suggesting that Clay Shaw was the mysterious "Clay Bertrand" sought after the assassination of President Kennedy.

Attorney General Ramsey Clark took responsibility for the snafu in a statement issued by a Department spokesman. Clark, the spokesman said, felt that justice would best be served by the embarrassing admission.

Shaw, a 54-year-old New Orleans businessman, has been accused by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison of plotting to kill the late President under the alias of "Clay Bertrand."

Shaw has vehemently denied any role in the convoluted conspiracy that Garrison has alleged. He has also denied ever using "Clay Bertrand" as an alias.

The day after Shaw's March 1 arrest, however, Attorney General Clark told reporters in an impromptu news conference on Capitol Hill that Shaw had been "checked out and cleared" by the FBI in the weeks following the assassination in Dallas Nov. 22, 1963.

For Shaw, the statement caused only trouble. The FBI never investigated anyone named Clay Shaw in 1963. It did check into allegations surrounding a "Clay Bertrand"—who was said to have sought legal help for Lee Harvey Oswald, accused slayer, after the assassination — but decided, without ever finding "Bertrand," that they were without substance.

For Clark to say that Shaw had been "checked out," consequently, amounted to saying that Shaw was Bertrand. "We think it's the same guy," one Department official said on March 2.

In recent weeks, Garrison has seized on this as proof of his claims.

The Justice Department's initial impression, however, apparently based on first-blush reports of informants in New Orleans after Shaw's arrest, was repudiated by yesterday's statement. It was issued after a May 24 request by Shaw's attorney, Edward F. Wegmann, for "a public clarification."

"No evidence was found (in 1963) that Clay Shaw was ever called 'Clay Bertrand,' the Justice spokesman said. He added that the Department still has no evidence to indicate that he used such an alias.

"The Attorney General's comment on March 2 that Mr. Shaw was involved in the investigation," the Department added, "was based on a briefing that morning.

"The Attorney General has since determined that this was erroneous. Nothing arose (in 1963) indicating a need to investigate Mr. Shaw."

True, but reliable hearsay [illegible] that he and Ethel [illegible] New Orleans [illegible] may have [illegible] such an alias. We should be careful in public statements in view of the possibility that Garrison may be able to prove that he used the alias. See attached.

( ) Crandall
( ) Cubbage
(✓) ~~Flannagan~~ BCF
( ) Kaplan
( ) Moore
(✓) Oliver
( ) White
( ) Williams
(✓) Worthington
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